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## MINOR EDITORIALS.

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### SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY.

OPPOSITION to the sociological method has already come from students of theology, and more friction is to be expected. Much of this conflict comes from a misunderstanding which it is important to correct.

Sociology has for a part of its task the explanation of the phenomena of society. Explanation implies the tracing of the paths of causation in the cosmic order. The word explanation is used with this meaning in chemistry, physics, biology and psychology. Theology is also an effort of the human intellect to explain all phenomena of nature mind and society. But its explanations go deeper than those of the sciences already mentioned, and are required by a distinct intellectual want. Our rational nature asks not only for the immediate causes of events in the cosmic order, but also for the very ground of that order itself and of the forces which appear in the visible and tangible conscious world. These two forms of rational effort are not contradictory nor mutually exclusive.

Mr. Spencer, in his chapter on "The Theological Bias," develops one phase of the subject: "No one need expect, then, that the religious consciousness will die away or will change the lines of its evolution. Its specialities of form, once strongly marked and becoming less distinct during past mental progress, will continue to fade, but the substance of the consciousness will persist. That the object-matter can be replaced by another object-matter, as supposed by those who think the 'Religion of Humanity' will be the religion of the future, is a belief countenanced neither by induction nor by deduction. However dominant may become the moral sentiment enlisted on behalf of humanity, it can never exclude the sentiment, alone properly called religious, awakened by that which is behind Humanity, and behind all other things. . . . No such thing as a 'Religion of Humanity' can ever do more than temporarily shut out the thought of a Power of which Humanity is but a small and fugitive product—a Power which

was in course of ever-changing manifestations before Humanity was, and will continue through other manifestations when Humanity has ceased to be.

"To recognitions of this order the anti-theological bias is a hindrance. Ignoring the truth for which religions stand, it undervalues religions in the past, thinks they are needless in the present, and expects they will leave no representatives in the future. Hence mistakes in sociological reasonings."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the anti-theological disposition agrees with the ultra-theological disposition in insisting that the two forms of explanation are mortal foes. Materialism leaves no room for the theological rationale because it identifies the phenomena with this ground. Pantheism seems to involve the same confusion. Strict Positivism denies the possibility of knowing this ground of being, and thoroughgoing Agnosticism discourages attempts to formulate intelligible statements of its nature.

This is not the place for a discussion as to the truth or falsehood of the metaphysics of Comte, Spencer or Spinoza. The various positions are mentioned simply to indicate their relations to the exclusively theological mode of representing the origin and ends of events in the cosmic order. While the "scientific" mind rests contented with a complete statement of the causes which lie within the range of observed phenomena, the "theological" mind is prone to resent such interpretation as irreligious. But the antagonism lies rather in the false attitude of controversialists than in the essence of the problem. The tasks of the sciences and of metaphysics are both necessary and both legitimate.

One of the evil results of antagonism is a partial and inadequate science, a seriously mutilated theory. The demands of the intellect are never fully met until the phenomenal and the philosophical explanations are made as complete and consistent as the limitations of our faculties admit.

Serious practical evils arise from the confusion and antagonism of partial views. Men who regard each other with suspicion and jealousy on theoretical grounds are incapable of complete social coöperation, and out of such disputes arise wasteful and hurtful division of the forces of social amelioration.

The immense motive force of the religious organizations will be

<sup>1</sup> *The Study of Sociology*, pp. 311-312.

admitted even by those who regard them as evanescent and illegitimate. Incalculable moral energies are generated by the emotional enthusiasm of religious societies. We cannot understand the social movements of our age without reckoning with these forces, and we cannot promote the helpful agencies of amelioration without enlisting them.

On the other hand, these currents and torrents of religious feeling have great need of the precise methods, the painstaking knowledge of details, the exact measurement of available power, the clairvoyant common sense of the scientific mind. The mill streams of New England run to waste until they are harnessed to suitable machinery.

It is to the interest of society at large that these two distinct but complementary methods of study should not be set in endless conflict. Sociology is not identical with theology, and has not the same intellectual task. Its scientific procedure lies entirely within the range of the phenomena of an observed social order. It does not profess to pronounce upon the metaphysical soundness of the fundamental religious faiths: that is the function of theology.

This does not mean that the facts of the religious life, in consciousness, conduct and institutions can be ignored by sociology. Every work on social science, even from an author who regards religion as a transitory dream of unenlightened men, must have its chapters on religious forces and ecclesiastical institutions.

Nor, in distinguishing the two fields of study, sociology and theology, are we suggesting that sociology is or can be a subject indifferent to the religious thinker or practical leader. On the contrary we most strenuously urge that sociology, even in its present initial stage, is the most immediately useful scientific instrument for the teacher of ethics and religion. The sociological method is already beginning to revolutionize the mode of thinking in theology, in exegesis, in church history, in ethics, and in pulpit rhetoric. It is an effort to know the life of mankind in its kinship, in its widest and most essential aspects, in its revelations of a moral order, in its suggestions of a ground of universal being which is essentially just and good. It has already helped to formulate some of the essential conditions of wise philanthropy and of the progressive realizations of the highest ideals yet attained by the best souls of the race.

C. R. H.